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ABSTRACT

This study examined whether increased exploratory field experiences affected the perceptions and evaluations of secondary school student teachers at Indiana State University. Studied were 238 student teachers who were simultaneously undergoing two different professional preparation programs: 154 were in a program requiring only one field experience, and 84 were in a program requiring a minimum of four exploratory field experiences prior to student teaching. Two instruments were used for analysis. A questionnaire asked student teachers to report their feelings of adequacy in performing designated teaching skills and to identify major problems during student teaching; an evaluation form was completed by supervising teachers. A chi-square analysis of significance was conducted for both instruments since they were on a Likert scale. Results indicated that a significant difference existed in three of the 20 teaching skills: (1) writing and teaching a behavioral objective; (2) assisting pupils with reading difficulties; and (3) teaching handicapped students. There was no significant difference for any of the 26 factors on the evaluation form. The major problem reported by student teachers was discipline. The study's results led to the conclusion that increased field experiences had little or no effect upon student teacher evaluations or student teacher perceptions of their ability to perform designated teaching tasks. Further study is recommended to isolate variables that may be related to field experiences and their impact upon student teaching. (Author/JD)

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THE EFFECT OF INCREASED EXPLORATORY FIELD EXPERIENCES UPON THE PERCEPTIONS AND PERFORMANCE OF STUDENT TEACHERS

Marvin A. Henry
Indiana State University
ATE Convention
Phoenix, AZ
February 16, 1982

ABSTRACT

The study sought to determine whether increased exploratory field experiences affected the perceptions and evaluations of secondary student teachers at Indiana State University. A total of 238 student teachers who were simultaneously undergoing two different professional preparational programs was studied; 154 were on a program which required only one field experience and 84 were on a program which required a minimum of four exploratory field experiences prior to student teaching. Two instruments were used for analysis: A questionnaire which asked student teachers to report the extent to which they felt adequate in performing designated teaching skills and to identify major problems during student teaching; and the evaluation form which was completed by supervising teachers. A chi-square analysis of significance was conducted for both instruments since they were on a Likert scale. Results indicated that a significant difference existed in three of the 20 teaching skills; write and teach a behavioral objective, assist pupils with reading difficulties, and teach handicapped students. There was no significant difference for any of the 26 factors on the evaluation form. The major problem reported by student teachers was discipline, but there was variation in problems which were reported less frequently. The study led to the conclusion that increased field experiences had little or no impact upon student teacher evaluations or student teacher perceptions of their ability to perform designated teaching tasks. Further study is recommended to isolate variables that may be related to field experiences and their impact upon student teaching.

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Introduction

Exploratory field experiences have become common components in teacher education programs in the past decade. According to the report of the ATE Commission on Exploratory Field Experiences (13), 99 percent of the teacher education institutions studied reported having exploratory field experiences presently as part of their certification requirements. Although experiences are realized through various types of delivery systems, there are common objectives and practices: (1) to explore teaching as a career early in the college experience, (2) to develop basic teaching skills in the field setting, and (3) to involve teachers more directly in teacher preparation.

Although the popularity of early field experiences is indisputable, evidence which shows the impact of such experiences is just beginning to appear. Bartos and Souter (2) studied the impact of early practicum students in public schools using the study format used by Michigan and Indiana to study student teaching. They concluded that the practicum student does have a positive impact on the school in which he/she is working, citing data showing increased help for individual students, more small group work and increased pupil motivation when practicum students were participating in classroom settings.

Other recent studies add support to exploratory field experiences. Haddad (6) found that the experience improved prospective teachers' ability to interact with students and increased their concern for teaching. Austin-Martin, Bull, and Molrine (1) studied 40 students in a pre-student teaching field experience course and found support for the hypothesis that a pre-student teaching experience positively affects prospective teacher interpersonal skills. According to their conclusions, a prospective teacher participating in a pre-student teaching course is equipped better to establish a more effective relationship with administrators, teachers, and pupils than a counterpart who did not participate in such a course. Sunal (11) investigated the effects of an elementary methods course on preservice teachers by comparing two groups with the experimental group being involved with a campus-based field experience sequence in addition to formal study of methods. The major difference occurred in the ability of students with field experiences to more adequately model specific teacher roles when asked to do so.

Purpose and Procedure

This study sought to determine whether a preparation program which included a greater number of exploratory field experiences affected the perceptions and evaluation of secondary student teachers at Indiana State University.

In 1978, the State of Indiana promulgated new certification guidelines (Rules 46-47) which mandated "early, specific, and continuing exploratory field experiences." Prior to this mandate the secondary program of early experiences had been minimal with a single required experience of ten hours of observation and participation in a general methods course. The program devised to meet the new standards includes four distinct field experiences prior to student teaching: teaching aide-observer (20-30 hours), participation with or observation of youth in their cultural settings (10-20 hours), teaching assistant (ten hours minimum), and individual reading tutor (ten hour minimum).

During the period from 1978-1982, two different programs have existed simultaneously at Indiana State University, accommodating the students who were certifying under guidelines in effect prior to September, 1978 (Bulletin 400), and those who were enrolled on or after September, 1978, and required to meet the requirements of Rules 46-47. The two groups were compared to determine whether there were any differences in their supervisory evaluations and in their perceptions of teaching skills. Since the two programs were similar except for greater emphasis on field experiences and the addition of a required course in teaching reading in content areas, it was assumed that any differences would be the result of the amount of participation.

The population for this study consisted of all secondary and all-grade student teachers at Indiana State University spring and fall semesters, 1981. A total of 238 student teachers was involved, 154 of whom completed certification under Bulletin 400 and 84 under Rules 46-47.

In order to secure student teacher perceptions, a questionnaire was developed which listed skills which are identified in course objectives and syllabi of the secondary professional education courses. (Appendix A). The questionnaire was completed by student teachers at the conclusion of their professional semester. Responses were recorded on a Likert scale which assessed the students' perceptions about being adequately prepared to perform such skills. A chi-square analysis was used to determine any statistical differences between the two groups. A final section asked student teachers to identify the two major problems which were experienced during student teaching. Responses were subsumed into major categories and percentages were computed.

The evaluation comparisons were made by analysis of the evaluation forms which were completed by supervising teachers. (Appendix B). The form contains a five-point Likert scale ranging from outstanding to poor. The bottom two categories were collapsed due to the infrequency of responses in these columns resulting in the analysis of four degrees of skill. A chi-square analysis was used to determine any statistical differences between the groups.

Analysis of Results

1. Do student teachers who have completed a greater number of field experiences perceive that their performance of designated teaching skills is different from those who completed a pattern which required fewer experiences? Of the twenty skills analyzed and reported in Table 1, three were found to differ significantly: write and teach a behavioral objective, assist pupils who have reading difficulties, and teach handicapped students. Further analysis of these three factors indicated that a greater percentage of the persons having fewer field experiences felt adequate to write and teach a behavioral objective. A greater percentage of student teachers who had increased field experiences felt more adequate to assist pupils with reading difficulties and to teach handicapped students. It should be observed that a tutoring experience in reading is required for students under Rules 46-47 as a part of a course, Teaching Reading in the Content Areas.

2. Do student teachers who have had increased field experiences receive different evaluations from those who completed a pattern which requires fewer experiences? Table 2 presents comparisons of the 26 factors on the evaluation form which were completed by supervising teachers. There was no significant difference for any of the factors. One item, evaluating achievement, approached the level necessary for a significant difference with the greater percentages of student teachers having more field experiences receiving better evaluations.

3. Do student teachers who have had increased field experiences report different problems from those who completed a pattern which requires fewer experiences? Table 3 presents the tabulation of the problems most frequently reported by student teachers. The groups were virtually identical in reporting discipline to be the major problem: 48 percent of the Bulletin 400 group and 49 percent for the Rules 46-47 group. No other problem was reported nearly as frequently. Of the remaining problems that were reported with some frequency, the greatest difference was reported for teaching special needs students, with the persons having the greater number of experiences reporting difficulties more frequently. Other differences were in personal adjustment, relationships with supervising teacher, and techniques and methods. Student teachers with fewer field experiences reported more frequently problems of personal adjustment and relationships with the supervising teacher, and student teachers with a greater number of field experiences reported more frequently problems in teaching special needs students and methods and techniques. A rank difference coefficient of correlation of the eight problems reported most frequently indicated a correlation of .06.

Conclusions

Based on the analysis of the data presented, the following conclusions seem warranted:

1. The increased number of required field experiences in the secondary certification program at Indiana State University had little impact upon student teacher perceptions of their ability to perform specific teaching skills.

2. A course and/or a teaching experience in reading prior to student teaching enhanced the perceptions of student teachers to feel adequate about their ability to assist pupils who have reading difficulties.

3. Student teachers who had increased field experiences perceived that they were better prepared to teach handicapped students than those with fewer field experiences.

4. The number of exploratory field experiences had little or no impact upon the final evaluation of student teaching which was made by supervising teachers.

5. The number of exploratory field experiences had little or no impact upon the assessment of the major problem experienced during student teaching, but there is some evidence that student teachers with different amounts of field experiences perceive different kinds of problems.

Discussion

The results of this study point to the need for further investigation. Although the perception of the ability to perform specific skills seems similar regardless of field experiences, there may be other traits, as indicated in the literature, which are different. One can raise the question of whether the number of field experiences is sufficient to provide for the development of skills. A study which would dramatically increase the number of pre-student-teaching experiences might produce significantly different results. On the other hand, a more valid judgment might be made by a disinterested observer instead of relying upon data reported by student teachers.

Since a significant difference existed in the perception of the ability to teach reading, it seems to suggest that skills will be more completely developed when they are specifically assigned. In the case of a reading experience, a participant is assigned to tutor a pupil who has reading difficulty and to help him/her read better. Other participation requirements are not as specific. Improvement in other teaching skills may be revealed if the participants are assigned specific tasks.

James Popham has observed that 80 percent of evaluations are supportive of what is being done. The evaluations made by supervisors in this study seem to support that statement. In order to reliably evaluate performance between two groups, an investigator must attempt to account for any possible syndrome, such as this, which may be in operation.

The evidence in regard to the impact of field experiences in teaching special needs students seems contradictory. The ability to teach handicapped students was significant in questionnaire results with evidence indicating that pupils who had increased field experiences felt more competent. However, in the open-ended section, student teachers with increased field experiences reported more difficulties with special needs students. Since the latter was reported by a small number of student teachers, it seems reasonable to assume that some other variable might account for this apparent inconsistency.

It should be noted that the problem of discipline continues to emerge as a major problem regardless of preparation. This matter needs further attention in order to determine whether a preparational program or any number of supervised field experiences can more effectively prepare teachers to be more competent and confident in dealing with pupil discipline.

Although the results of this study fail to provide a ringing endorsement for field experiences, neither does it reject them. Field experiences are in their infancy. Given opportunities for teachers and teacher-preparation institutions to closely collaborate in teacher preparation and given the almost universal advocacy of exploratory field experiences, it seems reasonable to continue, and even accelerate, exploratory field experiences while at the same time evaluating their impact and scheduling them so that the greatest amount of learning can occur.

Table 1

Chi-Square Analysis of Teaching Skills as Reported by Student Teachers Who Completed Certification Under Two Different Programs

		X^2	Level
1.	Write unit plans	4.425	
2.	Write daily lesson plans	13.185	.05
3.	Write and teach a behavioral objective	2.115	
4.	Work with small groups	3.019	
5.	Organize and present a lecture	1.208	
6.	Ask classroom questions	.196	
7.	Work individually with students	1.469	
8.	Assist pupils who have reading difficulties	10.961	.05
9.	Utilize media equipment	1.317	
10.	Handle disruptive students	3.674	
11.	Handle routine duties such as attendance and reports	2.951	
12.	Prevent discipline problems from occurring	2.640	
13.	Write reliable test items	.651	
14.	Determine grades	4.244	
15.	Teach students who represent a variety of cultural backgrounds	.692	
16.	Teach handicapped students	12.296	.05
17.	Participate in the development on an IEP	1.657	
18.	Establish rapport with students	2.507	
19.	Influence pupil behavior through the use of non-verbal behaviors	3.449	
20.	Motivate students	.275	

Table 2

Chi-Square Analysis of Student Teacher Evaluations as Reported by Supervising Teachers

		X^2	Significance
1.	Presenting content	4.252	
2.	Questioning techniques	5.567	
3.	Evaluating achievement	7.545	
4.	Motivating students	1.775	
5.	Directing learning activities	3.494	
6.	Knowledge and understanding of subject matter	2.675	
7.	Planning and organization	6.787	
8.	Classroom discipline	4.889	
9.	Record keeping	2.842	
10.	Recognition of individual differences	.165	
11.	Demonstration of ethical behavior	1.398	
12.	Selection and use of instructional media	3.151	
13.	Appearance	.056	
14.	Voice qualities	2.792	
15.	English usage-oral/written	.849	
16.	Maturity	3.831	
17.	Self-confidence and poise	3.264	
18.	Enthusiasm	1.231	
19.	Responsibility	1.262	
20.	Flexibility	.873	
21.	Relationship with students	.678	
22.	Relationship with faculty	6.724	
23.	Relationship with supervising teacher	.297	
24.	Reaction to suggestions and criticism	2.683	
25.	Self evaluation	1.386	
26.	Summary evaluation	2.154	

Table 3

Comparisons of Teaching Problems Identified by
Student Teachers Who Completed Certification
Under Two Different Programs

	Bulletin 400		Rules 46-47	
	N	%	N	%
1. Discipline	53	48	37	49
2. Personal adjustment	15	14	5	6
3. Relationships with supervising teachers	12	10	4	5
4. Planning	10	9	5	7
5. Pupil relationships	9	8	4	5
6. Subject preparation	8	7	3	4
7. Techniques and methods	5	5	7	9
8. Teaching special needs students	2	2	8	12

Appendix A

Questionnaire Administered to Student Teachers

1. I completed the certification program of

_____ Bulletin 400 (old program)

_____ TEACH (new program)

I. Preparation for Performing Teaching Skills

How well prepared do you feel to:

	Very Adequate	Adequate	Less Than Adequate	Feel Unprepared
1. write unit plans?				
2. write daily lesson plans?				
3. write and teach a behavioral objective?				
4. work with small groups?				
5. organize and present a lecture?				
6. ask classroom questions?				
7. work individually with students?				
8. assist pupils who have reading difficulties/ etc.				
9. utilize media equipment?				
10. handle disruptive students?				
11. handle routine duties such as attendance, announcements, etc.?				
12. prevent discipline problems from occurring?				
13. write reliable test items?				
14. determine grades?				
15. teach students who represent a variety of cultural backgrounds?				
16. teach handicapped students?				
17. participate in the development of an individualized education program (IEP)?				
18. establish rapport with students?				
19. influence pupil behavior through the use of non-verbal behaviors (body movements, facial expressions, etc.)?				
20. motivate students?				

II. Problems and Program Improvement

What were the two major problems which you experienced during student teaching?

21.

22.

Evaluation of Supervised Teaching Experience · Secondary

Indiana State University File No. _____

This form should be typed using dark ribbon and carbon paper reversed so that the typing will appear in reverse image on the back of the form.

Student Teacher _____ Subject _____ Date _____

School _____ School District _____ City _____

I. School Environment and Supervisor Contact : (Place an X before each appropriate word.)

A. Type of community: ___ inner city, ___ city, ___ suburban, ___ small town, ___ rural, ___ other _____

B. Grade levels taught: ___ elem., ___ mid. school, ___ jr. high, ___ sr. high. C. Description of classes taught: ___ low, ___ high, ___ mixed.

D. Organization: ___ departmentalized, ___ team, ___ open concept, ___ other _____

E. Other significant activities in which the student teacher participated: _____

II. Evaluation profile based on observation of student teacher. (Check each item in one column only.)

Academic and Instructional Competence	Outstanding	Above Average	Average	Below Average	Poor	No Basis For Judgment	Personal Characteristics and Interpersonal Relationships	Outstanding	Above Average	Average	Below Average	Poor	No Basis For Judgment
Teaching Skill:							Appearance						
Presenting content							Voice qualities						
Questioning techniques							English usage—oral/written						
Evaluating achievement							Maturity						
Motivating students							Self-confidence and poise						
Directing learning activities							Enthusiasm						
Professional Competence:							Responsibility						
Knowledge and understanding of subject matter							Flexibility						
Planning and organization							Relationship with students						
Classroom discipline							Relationship with faculty						
Record keeping							Relationship with supervising teacher						
Recognition of individual differences							Reaction to suggestions and criticism						
Demonstration of ethical behavior							Self evaluation						
Selection and use of instructional media							SUMMARY EVALUATION						

III. Comments. Include evaluative, elaborative, and supportive comments concerning the student teacher's strengths, areas needing improvement, and growth pattern during student teaching.

Typed Name _____ Signature _____

Evaluation by (check one):
☐ supervising classroom teacher
☐ university supervisor

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